

THE MAIDS OF PARADISE

By
W. Chambers
"The Conspirators"
"Aids-at-Arms" etc.

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(Continued from last week)
SYNOPSIS.

CHAPTER I—Scarlett, an American soldier of fortune, in the employ of the French Imperial Police at the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian war, is ordered to arrest John Buckhurst, a leader of the Communists, who is suspected of having stolen the French crown jewels. While searching for Buckhurst Scarlett is ordered to arrest Countess de Vassart and her group of socialists and escort them to the Belgian coast.

CHAPTER II—Scarlett finds Sylvia Elven of the Odessa disguised as a peasant and carries her to La Trappe, where the countess and her friends are assembled.

CHAPTER III—All are arrested. The countess saves Scarlett from a fatal fall from the roof of the house. He denounces Buckhurst as the leader of the Reds and the countess conducts him to where Buckhurst is secreted.

CHAPTER IV—Gorman Uhlans descend on the place and Buckhurst escapes during the melee. Scarlett is wounded.

CHAPTER V—He recovers consciousness in the countess' home at Morbronn, where he is cared for by the countess. A fierce battle is fought in the streets between French and Prussian soldiers.

CHAPTER VI—Buckhurst professes repentance and returns the crown jewels to Scarlett. He declares he will give himself up to the authorities. Scarlett doubts his sincerity. Buckhurst urges the countess to go to Paradise.

CHAPTER VII—Buckhurst admits that he receives pay from the Russians for information which he does not give. He secures passport to the French lines for Scarlett, the countess and himself.

CHAPTER VIII—Scarlett reports to the secret service in Paris and in charge. He deposits the crown jewels and later, when making a detailed report, finds that people have been substituted for the real stones. Speed, a comrade in the service, warns Scarlett that Morzac is dangerous. He also informs him that all the government treasure is being transported to the coast for shipment out of the country. Scarlett and Speed escape to join a circus.

CHAPTER IX—The circus arrives at Paradise where Scarlett secures a license from the mayor.

CHAPTER X—An order is received by the mayor calling the citizens to arms.

CHAPTER XI—Jacqueline, daughter of the Lizard, offers to join the circus to give exhibitions in the character of a mermaid.

CHAPTER XII—Scarlett makes friends with the Lizard.

CHAPTER XIII—Scarlett calls on the countess at her home in Paradise. He finds Sylvia Elven also there. He learns the countess has withdrawn from the socialists. They swear eternal friendship.

CHAPTER XIV.

The Path of the Lizard.

About nine o'clock the next morning, an incident occurred which might have terminated my career in one way, and did, ultimately, end it in another.

I had been exercising my lions and putting them through their paces, and had noticed no unusual insubordination among them, when suddenly, Timour Melek, a big Algerian lion, flew at me without the slightest provocation or warning.

Fortunately I had a training-chair in my hand, on which Timour had just been sitting, and I had time to thrust it into his face. "Down, Timour Melek! Down! down!" I said, steadily, accompanying each word with a blow of the whip across the nose.

The brute had only hurt himself when he struck the chair, and now, under the blows raining on his sensitive nose, he doubtless remembered similar episodes in his early training, and shrank back, nearly deafening me with his roars. I followed, punishing him, and he fled towards the low iron grating which separated the training-cage from the night quarters.

I was not in perfect trim that morning. Not that I felt nervous in the least, nor had I any lack of self-confidence, but I was not myself. The lions had been aware of it as soon as I set foot in their cage; and I knew it.

As I emerged from the cage Speed asked me whether I was hurt, and I gasped out that I was not.

"What went wrong?" he persisted. "Speed, it was one of those seconds that come to us, when the faintest shadow of indecision settles matters. Engineers are subject to it at the throttle, pilots at the helm, captains in battle—"

"Non-in-love," added Speed.

I looked him over in astonishment.

"What's the matter with you?" he asked, amused.

"What's the matter with you?" I demanded. "If you mean to intimate that I have fallen in love you are certainly an astonishing ass!"

"Don't talk that way," he said, good-humoredly. "I didn't dream of such a thing, or of offending you, Scarlett."

I had an appointment to meet Robert the Lizard at noon, and I was rather curious to find out how much his promises were worth when the novelty of his new gun had grown stale.

The poacher was sunning himself on his doorstep when I came into view over the black basalt rocks. To my surprise, he touched his cap as I approached, and rose civilly, replying to my greetings with a brief, "Salute, m'lord!"

"You are prompt to the minute," I said, pleasantly.

"Come to the point, m'lord," he said, dryly. "We have struck palm."

"Lizard," I said, "give me your confidence as I give you mine. Yesterday, on a visit to Point Paradise, I saw a man lying belly down in the bracken; but I didn't let him know I saw him. I have served in the police

I think I recognize that man. He is known in Belleville as Tric-Trac. He came here, I believe, to see a man called Buckhurst. Can you find this Tric-Trac for me? Do you, perhaps, know him?"

"Yes," said the Lizard. "I knew him in prison."

"How long has he been here in Paradise?"

"For two months."

"He is a slow—a town rat. He came here to meet a man named Buckhurst."

"I have seen that man Buckhurst, too. What is he doing here?" asked the Lizard.

"That is what I want you to find out and help me to find out!" I said. "Well! Now you know what I want of you. Think out a plan which will permit me to observe this Monsieur Tric-Trac at my leisure, without myself being observed."

"That is easy," he said. "I take him food today."

The village square in Paradise was nearly deserted. The children had raced away to follow the newly arrived gendarmes as closely as they dared, and the women were in-doors hanging about their men, whom the government summoned to Lorient.

Far away towards Sainte-Ysabelle we saw the blue woods which were our goal. However, we had no intention of going there as the bee flies, partly because Tric-Trac might see us, partly because the Lizard wished any prowling passer-by to observe that he was on his guard with his illegitimate profession.

"What's that box?" asked the Lizard. "All the while we had been twisting and doubling and edging nearer and nearer to the Sainte-Ysabelle woods, until we were already within their cool shadow, and I heard the tinkle of a stream among leafy depths."

The Lizard's poacher's eyes began to glimmer and shimmer in the dusk like the eyes of wild things that hunt at night.

Presently he beckoned me, stepped into the moss, and crawled without a sound straight through the holly thicket.

"Watch here," he whispered. "Count a hundred when I disappear, then creep on your stomach to the edge of that bank."

Before I had counted fifty I heard the Lizard cry out, "Bonjour, Tric-Trac!" but I counted on, obeying the Lizard's orders as I should wish mine to be obeyed. I counted one hundred and crept forward to the mossy edge of the bank, under the yellow beach leaves.

Below me stood the Lizard, intently watching a figure crouched on hands and knees before a small, iron-bound box.

The person addressed as Tric-Trac promptly tried to hide the box by sitting down on it.

"Flute!" he snarled. "Like a mud-rat, you creep with no sound—c'est pas polite, non d'un nom!"

"What's that box?" asked the Lizard, abruptly.

"Box? I don't see any box."

"You're sitting on it," observed the Lizard. "What's in it?"

"Don't know," replied Tric-Trac, with brisk interest. "I found it."

The Lizard was silent.

"Did you bring me anything to chew on?" inquired Tric-Trac, sniffing at the poacher's sack.

"Bread, cheese, three pheasants, cider—more than I eat in a week," said the Lizard, quietly. "It will cost forty sous."

He opened his sack and slowly displayed the provisions.

I looked hard at the iron-bound box.

On one end was printed the Geneva cross. Doctor Delmont and Professor Tavernier had disappeared carrying Red Cross funds. Was that their box?

Tric-Trac having devoured the cheese, bread and an entire pheasant, made a bundle of the remaining food, emptied the cider jug, wiped his beardless face with his cap, and announced that he would be pleased to "broll" a cigarette.

The Lizard laughed, and Tric-Trac, disgusted, stood up, settled his cap over his wide ears, humming a song as he loosened his trousers belt. "Who are you saying at?" he asked, abruptly.

"Boy, c'est ma soeur. Et apres Drop that box! The next time you come here to sell your snared pheasants, come like a man, non de Dieu, and not like a cat or the glaciérol—o I'll find a way to stop your curiosity."

He picked up his box and the packet of provisions, dropped his revolver into the side pocket of his jacket, cocked his great cap, blew a kiss to the Lizard, and started off straight in to the forest.

On our way home I drew from the poacher that Tric-Trac had named Morzac as head of the communist plot in Brittany; that Morzac was coming to Paradise very soon, and that then something gay might be looked for.

And that night I took Speed into my confidence and finally Kelly Eyre, our balloonist.

CHAPTER XV.

Forewarned.

The lions had now begun to give me a great deal of trouble. Oh, they know, and I know, that matters had gone wrong with me; that I had, for a time, at least, lost the intangible something which I once possessed—that occult right to dominate.

That morning, as I left the training cage—where among others, Kelly Eyre stood looking on—I suddenly remembered Sylvia Elven and her message to Eyre, which I had never delivered.

"My son," said I, politely, "do you think you have arrived at an age sufficiently mature to warrant my delivering to you a message from a pretty girl?"

"There's no harm in attempting it, my venerable friend," he replied, laughing.

"This is the message," I said: "On Sunday the book stores are closed in Paris."

"Who gave you that message, Scarlett?" he stammered.

He was so young, so manly, so unspelled, and so red, that on an impulse I said: "Kelly, it was Mademoiselle Elven who sent you the message."

His face expressed troubled astonishment.

"Is that her name?" he asked.

"Well—it's one of them, anyway," I replied, beginning to feel troubled in my turn. "See here, Kelly, it's not my business, but you won't mind if I speak plainly, will you? I know Mademoiselle Elven—slightly. I am afraid of her—and I have not yet decided why."

"But—I don't know her," he said; "or, at least I don't know her by that name."

"Then who do you believe sent you that message, Kelly?"

His cheeks began to burn again, and he gave me an uncomfortable look.

A silence, and he sat down in my dressing room, his boyish head buried in his hands. After a glance at him I began changing my training suit for riding clothes, whistling the while softly to myself. As I buttoned a fresh collar he looked up.

"Mr. Scarlett, I should like to tell you about myself; . . . I was a clerk in the consular office in Paris when Monsieur Tissandier took a fancy to me, and I entered his balloon attelage to learn to assist him. Then the government began to make much of us . . . you remember? We started experiments for the army. . . . I was intensely interested, and . . . there was not much talk about ecrecy then. . . . I made an invention—a little electric screw which steered a balloon . . . sometimes . . ."

He laughed, a mirthful laugh, and looked at me. All the color had gone from his face.

"There was a woman—" I turned partly towards him.

"I know," I said.

"Somehow we always talked about military balloons. And that evening . . . she was so interested in my work . . . I brought some little sketches I had made—"

"I understand," I said.

He looked at me miserably. "She was to return the sketches to me at Calman's—the fashionable book store. . . . next day. . . . I never thought that the next day was to be Sunday. . . . The book stores of Paris are not open on Sunday—but the war office is."

"I began to put on my coat."

"And the sketches were asked for?"

I suggested—"and you naturally told what had become of them?"

"I refused to name her."

"So they sent you to a fortress?" I asked.

"To New Caledonia. . . . four years. . . . I was only twenty, Scarlett. . . . and ruined. . . . I joined Byram in Antwerp and risked the tour through France."

"You never saw her again?"

"I was under arrest on Sunday. I do not know. . . . I like to believe that she went to the book store on Monday. . . . that she made an innocent mistake. . . . but I never knew, Scarlett. . . . I never knew."

"Suppose you ask her?" I said.

His firm hand tightened on mine, then he walked away, steadily, head high. And I went out to saddle my horse for a canter across the moor to Point Paradise.

So, by strange ways and eccentric circles, like the aerial paths of homing sea-birds, I came at last to the spot I had set out for, consciously; yet it surprised me to find I had come there.

A boy took my horse; a servant in full Breton costume admitted me; the velvet humming of Sylvia Elven's spinning-wheel filled the silence, like the whirling of a great, soft moth imprisoned in a room.

The door swung open noiselessly; the whirr of the wheel and the sound of the song filled the room for an instant, then was shut out as the Countess de Vassart closed the door and came forward to greet me.

"Are you troubled?" she asked, then colored at her own question, as though deeming the impulse to speak unwarranted.

"No, not troubled. Happiness is often edged with a shadow. I am content to be here."

Her face grew graver. "You must forget the past," she said; "you must forget all that was cruel and false and unhappy. . . . will you not?"

"Yes, madame."

"I, too," she said, "have much to forget and much to hope for; and you taught me how to forget and how to hope."

"I, madame?"

"Yes. . . . at La Trappe, at Morbronn, and here. Look at me. Have I not changed?"

"Yes," I said, fascinated.

I picked up my gloves and riding crop; as I rose she stood up in the dusk, looking straight at me.

"Will you come again?" she asked.

I stammered a promise and made my way blindly to the door which a servant threw open, flung myself astride my horse, and galloped out into the waste of moorland, feeling nothing, hearing nothing save the low roar of the sea, like the growl of restless lions.

CHAPTER XVI.

A Restless Man.

When I came into camp, late that afternoon, I found Byram and Speed groping about among a mass of newspapers and letters, the first mail we circus people had received for nearly two months.

There were letters for all who were accustomed to look for letters from families, relatives, or friends at home. I never received letters—I had received none of that kind in nearly a score of years.

But there were newspapers enough, and to spare—French, English, American; and I sat down by my lion's cage and attempted to form some opinion of the state of affairs in France.

When, on the 3rd of September, the humiliating news arrived that the emperor was a prisoner and his army annihilated, the government, for the first time in its existence, acted with promptness and decision in a matter of importance. Secret orders were sent by couriers to the Bank of France, to the Louvre, and to the Invalides; and, that same night, train after train rushed out of Paris loaded with the battle flags from the Invalides, the most important pictures and antique sculptures from the Louvre, the greater part of the gold and silver from the Bank of France, and, last but by no means least, the crown and jewels of France.

These trains were dispatched to Brest, and at the same time a telegram was directed to the admiral commanding the French iron-clad fleet in the Baltic to send an armored cruiser to Brest with all haste possible, there to await further orders, but to be fully prepared in any event to take on board certain goods designated in cipher. This we knew in a general way, though Speed understood that Lorient was to be the port of departure.

The plan, then, was simple; but, for an equally simple reason, it miscarried in the following manner: On the 4th of September the treasure-laden trains had left Paris for Brest. On the 5th the Hirondeille steamed out towards the fleet with the news from Sedan, and the orders for the detachment of a cruiser to receive the crown jewels. On the 6th the news and the orders were signaled to the flagship; but the God of battles unchained a tempest which countermanded the order and buried the ironclads into outer darkness.

So, for days and days, the treasure-laden trains must have stood helpless in the station at Brest, awaiting the cruiser that did not come.

Speed and I already knew the secret orders sent. The treasures, including the crown diamonds, were to be stored in the citadel, and an armored cruiser was to lie off the arsenal with banked fires, ready to receive the treasures at the first signal and steam to the French fortified port of Saigon in Cochinchina, by a course already determined.

Why on earth those orders had been changed so that the cruiser was to lie off Groix I could not imagine, unless some plot had been discovered in Lorient which had made it advisable to shift the location of the treasures for the third time.

Pondering there at the tent door, amid my heap of musty newspapers, I looked out into the late, gray afternoon and saw the maids and men of Paradise passing and repassing across the bridge.

A few moments later drums began to roll from the square. Speed, passing, called out to me that the conscripts were leaving for Lorient; so I walked down to the bridge, where the crowd had gathered and where a tall gendarme stood, his blue-and-white uniform distinct in the early evening light.

"Attention!" cried the officer, a slim, hectic lieutenant from Lorient. The mayor handed him the rolls, and the lieutenant, facing the shuffling single rank, began to call off:

"Roux de Bannalec?"

"Here, monsieur!"

"Don't say, 'Here, monsieur!' Say, 'Present!' Now, Roux!"

"Present, monsieur!"

"Idiot! Kedrec?"

"Present!"

"Garenel?"

There was silence.

"Robert Garenel!" repeated the officer, sharply. "Monsieur the mayor has informed me that you are liable for military duty. If you are present, answer to your name or take consequences!"

The poacher, who had been lounging on the bridge, slouched slowly forward and touched his cap.

"I am organizing a franc corps," he said.

"You can explain that at Lorient," replied the lieutenant. "Fall in there!"

"But I—"

"Fall in!" repeated the lieutenant. The poacher's visage became inflamed. He hesitated, looking around for an avenue of escape. Then he caught my disgusted eye.

"For the last time," said the lieutenant, coolly drawing his revolver, "order you to fall in!"

The poacher backed into the straggling rank, glaring.

"Now," said the lieutenant, "you may go to your house and get your packet. If we have left when you return, follow and report at the arsenal in Lorient. Fall out! March!"

The poacher backed out to the rear of the rank, turned on his heel, and strode away towards the coast, clinched fists swinging by his side.

There were not many names on the roll, and the call was quickly finished. And now the infantry drummers raised their sticks high in the air, there was a sharp click, a crash, and the square ebbed.

"March!" cried the officer. The crowd pressed on into the dusk. For up the darkening road the white coffee of the women glimmered; the drum-roll softened to a distant humming.

A shape slunk near me through the dusk, furtive, uncertain. "Lizard," I said, indifferently. He came up, my gun on his rugged shoulder.

"You go with your class?" I asked.

"No, I go to the forest," he said, hoarsely. "You shall hear from me."

I nodded.

"Are you content?" he demanded, lingering.

The creature wanted sympathy, though he did not know it. I gave him my hand and told him he was a brave man; and he went away, noiselessly, leaving me musing by the river wall.

After a long while—or it may only have been a few minutes—the square began to fill again with the first groups of women, children, and old men who had escorted the departing conscripts a little way on their march to Lorient.

Long tables were improvised in the square, piled up with bread, sardines, puddings, hams and cakes. Casks of cider, propped on skids, dotted the outskirts of the bowling-green.

I turned away across the bridge out into the dark road. Long before I came to the smoky, silent camp I heard the monotonous roaring of my lions, pacing their shadowy dens.

(To be continued)

Corn Show Offers a Prize of \$25.

A cash prize of \$25 will be given at the Eleventh Annual Missouri State Corn Show to be held January 12-16, 1914, at the University of Missouri, for the largest yield of corn grown in the State. A gold watch is offered as first prize on both white and yellow corn in each of five sections of Missouri. These prizes are given in both the young men's and boys' classes. The Missouri Ruralist offers a loving cup for the best single ear of corn shown by a boy or young man.

Any information concerning the rules for competition may be obtained by writing to T. R. Douglass, secretary of the Missouri Corn Growers' Association, Columbia, Missouri.

Miss Mora Tracy of Aullville arrived Friday evening for a few days' visit here with Mr. and Mrs. A. W. Wilcox.

Sam Edmonds went to Kansas City Saturday for a few days' visit.

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Act in time by curing the kidneys.

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Many people in this locality recommend them.

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Mrs. A. A. McQuiston, Main St., Richmond, Mo., says: "I had so much backache and dull, nagging pain in my loins that I found it hard to get up after sitting. To be on my feet for any length of time was torture. I also had spells of dizziness. Doan's Kidney Pills not only removed the pain and lameness, but after taking them I felt much better and was able to do my housework with ease. The cure Doan's Kidney Pills made in my case has been permanent. I still recommend them."

For sale by all dealers. Price 50 cents. Foster-Milburn Co., Buffalo, New York, sole agents for the United States.

Remember the name—Doan's—and take no other.

Missouri University Offers Farm Course.

The college of agriculture of the University of Missouri has arranged to give branch short courses this winter for the farmers who are unable to attend the University. These courses are given at any place in Missouri where the local interest is sufficient to insure a good attendance and a successful course.

During the winter of 1911-12 eleven such courses were held in the following counties: Clark, Grundy, Harrison, Lewis, Lincoln, Macon, Newton, Nodaway, Pettis, Pike and St. Charles.

Eight hundred and sixty-two farmers received the benefit of these courses. This year the University desires to extend the work over the entire state. A large number of applications for information regarding branch short courses is expected by the College of Agriculture at Columbia, Missouri.

Fred Wilcox went to Kansas City Friday to spend the day.

Fred Wilcox went to Kansas City Friday to spend the day.

Mrs. Fannie Stonestreet went to Kansas City Friday to spend the day.

Mrs. F. M. Bevins of Kansas City spent Thursday here with friends.

Mrs. J. B. Ellis went to Kansas City Thursday evening to spend the day.

Miss Minnie Foster of Colorado Springs, Colo., and Mrs. R. S. Quinn of Kansas City arrived Friday for a visit here with the family of William Bandon.

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We are pleased to announce that we have a preparation for cleaning white serges without turning them dark. If you have a suit or skirt that has been darkened let us whiten it for you. Our process does not injure the cloth and suits with black trimmings can be whitened without effect on the trimmings. Bring your white serges down and let us show you what we can do with them. Crawford's Laundry and Dry Cleaning House. Phone 130.

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With vacuum and "Absorbo," which removes all smoke, stains and grease spots, brings out the colors and makes your carpet look as good as new. Will demonstrate any time. Call Winkler Furniture Company if interested.

Your neighbor is doing it, why not you? Buy your meat at the Pin-Ton, Surlin Steak 17½ cents per pound, Porter House Steak 20 cents, Round Steak 17½ cents, Chuck Steak 15 cents, Rib Roast 17½ cents, Boiling Meat 14 cents. Phone your order to 365.